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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
NATIONAL FOREIGN ASSESSMENT CENTER

14 February 1980

MEMORANDUM

CUBA: Looking to El Salvador

El Salvador unquestionably heads the Castro regime's list of Latin American countries where a repetition of the Nicaraguan experience seems likely over the next year. A measure of the importance that Cuba attaches to political developments in that country can be found in Fidel Castro's personal intervention with Salvadoran leftist leaders visiting Havana in mid-December. The group consisted of the secretaries general of three major extremist groups and the Salvadoran Communist Party. Castro warned them to avoid premature armed insurrection because that would only provoke a rightist counter coup. He urged them instead to try to radicalize the junta internally while simultaneously developing the military capabilities required to permit a seizure of power some time this year. He also called for a unification of opposition forces--a major theme in Cuban advice to virtually all revolutionary forces in Latin America in recent years.

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Castro also discussed the importance of Honduras for future revolutionary gains in Central America. He noted that Honduran militants could play the same supporting role for Salvadoran and Guatemalan guerrillas as they did for the Sandinistas in Nicaragua.

This memorandum was prepared by [] of the Latin America Division of the Office of Political Analysis. It was coordinated with the Clandestine Service. Questions and comments may be addressed to []

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Castro assumed a similar role in Havana's dealings with the Sandinistas in late 1978 and was instrumental in unifying the three Sandinista factions. In return for the Sandinistas unity agreement, the Cubans sharply increased their assistance in money, arms, and ammunition. The same may also occur in the case of El Salvador; a February issue of the Cuban military journal noted that on 9 January three of the leftist groups had announced the formation of an "organism of revolutionary coordination" and on 11 January four "mass" organizations had joined to form the "Coordinator of the United Popular Revolutionary Movement." A major tenet of Cuban revolutionary ideology holds that rebel groups are bound to failure if they have no grass roots support through mass organizations.

In addition to Castro's personal intervention, the Cubans have been assisting Salvadoran leftists for some time with training, safehaven, propaganda, and technical support.

The Cubans see their role in El Salvador as one of an arsenal, training center, adviser, and catalyst. They want the leftist groups to unify, develop lasting links to the masses through efficient organization, and prepare militarily for the moment when the probability of success is greatest. We believe Havana sees no role for Cuban troops but we expect they would have no hesitation in organizing and training "internationalist brigades" of leftists from a number of Latin American countries. In the final stages of the revolution, they may have a handful of Cuban advisers

secretly on the scene but they expect the Salvadorans to do the fighting, supported, if necessary, by the "international-ists."

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